

2/1/2023



Public Hearing Testimony before the Connecticut General Assembly's Housing Committee in Support of Raised Bill No. 6554:

An Act Appropriating Funds for Certain Homelessness Response Programs

Dear Senator Moore, Representative Luxenberg, Vice Chair Lesser and Vice Chair Khan, Senator Sampson, Representative Scott, and members of the Committee on Appropriations: Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support Raised Bill 6554: An Act Appropriating Funds for Certain Homelessness Response Programs.

Pamela Walsh, Center for Human Development (CHD)-Care Finds A Way/ Supportive Housing for persons struggling w Homelessness and Mental Health/Substance Use in Waterbury, CT.

I am here today to speak in support of this budget measure, which will help our state's homeless response system respond to the overwhelming demand for housing and homeless services statewide.

Connecticut is facing unprecedented challenges in our effort to prevent and end homelessness. Our lifesaving system is overburdened, historically underfunded, and confronting a workforce shortage that threatens the statewide safety net we provide. Our Homeless Response System providers are facing a fiscal cliff, with critical federal funding set to expire. **The legislature should invest \$50,000,000 to Rescue the Homeless Response System.** Only through this commitment to investment can we ensure that homelessness is infrequent and short-term, saving lives and public dollars.

Of the total \$50,000,000 investment, we urge this committee to commit the following amounts as dedicated, reliable sources of funding:

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\$37,046,452 to address chronic underfunding of homeless response nonprofits and to ensure adequate wages for front-line homeless response workers:

- \$28,155,326 increase in DOH Housing/Homeless Services line
 - \$7,713,799 increase in DMHAS Housing/Supports Services line
 - \$967,373 increase in DOH Homeless Youth line
 - \$209,954 increase in DOH Municipal Housing/Homeless Services line
1. **\$5.95 million annually** in the DOH Housing/Homeless Services line for Coordinated Access Network infrastructure. As an emergency response system, we need stable and permanent funding to support our infrastructure. Without funding, thousands of Connecticut residents would be put at immediate risk of homelessness every year.
 2. **\$5 million annually** in the DOH Housing/Homeless Services line for the annual Cold Weather Emergency Response Program. Every winter, our system strains to provide cold weather emergency services and to meet the demand for professional staff, wages for emergency-level services, and enough beds to keep people from freezing outside.
 3. **\$2 million annually** in the DOH Housing/Homeless Services line for a Flexible Funding Subsidy Pool to subsidize housing and provide flexible assistance. Flexible funding has been found to reduce the systemic costs of homelessness to public health and emergency response systems, resulting in both lower costs to the health care system and improved individual health outcomes.

The flood of persons struggling with homelessness is increasing daily in our community. We work tirelessly to help but there is not enough safe, affordable housing or new subsidized housing vouchers available, to meet the needs. The landlords we work with now are becoming overwhelmed with program contacts so we are working to obtain new landlords. Unfortunately, the low voucher FMRs are not enough to cover the rents being asked for in this area by landlords. Front-line staff are working diligently to teach our clients proper housing maintenance and overall holistic care while facing violence, drug abuse, and ongoing safety concerns in the neighborhoods they serve. Our program drove hard this past year to

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utilize some offered Department of Housing Moving On and HCV vouchers facilitated thru the Waterbury Housing Authority and J.D'Amelia & Associates, to "graduate" 35 clients ready for independent living w/o case management. Normally this doesn't happen unless a new grant is issued. This positive transition left all those vouchers open and we were able to house more people from homelessness. We need more opportunities like this to foster greater client independence, while still being able to offer the ongoing supports necessary to start housing others from our streets and shelters.

Thank you to the committee for the opportunity to testify. It is with your support that we can rescue the homeless response system and help make sure Connecticut's residents are healthy and stably housed.

Sincerely,

Pamela Walsh

Program Manager

Center for Human Development (CHD)

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